Inaugural Lecture
of the

Emile Bustani Middle East Seminar

Political Society in Lebanon:
A Historical Introduction

By

Albert Hourani

October 3, 1985

Center for International Studies
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Cambridge, Massachusetts

POLITICAL SOCIETY IN LEBANON: A HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

*Albert Hourani**

In this lecture I do not propose to discuss what has happened in Lebanon since 1975, and what is still happening. I am going to speak about the development of Lebanese political society over the centuries, and I shall end what I have to say before the outbreak of civil war, but perhaps it will help to explain the events of the last ten years if we see them in a broad historical perspective.

Let me begin with two views of Lebanon, of which one was current before 1975 and the other is widespread today. Before 1975 it was customary to think of Lebanon as a country which had achieved an almost miraculous balance between different communities and interests, and which was enjoying political stability and peace, comparative neutrality in the conflicts of the region, and a prosperity which seemed to be self-perpetuating.

In 1963, a conference on the politics of Lebanon was held at the University of Chicago, and the papers given there were later published. The first of them is by the sociologist Edward Shils, and in it he expresses a mood of euphoria, but of cautious euphoria. Contemporary Lebanon, he tells us,

> appears to be a happy phenomenon . . a prosperous, liberal country. It has a parliamentary body, freely elected . . . Its politicians are, as politicians go, relatively reasonable men. The tone of public debate is not strident. The Chamber of Deputies is an orderly assembly. Elections are conducted with a minimum of violence . . . It is a

* Albert Hourani taught the modern history of the Middle East in the University of Oxford from 1951 until his retirement in 1979. He was a Fellow of Magdalen College from 1948 until 1958, and a Fellow of St. Antony's College from then until 1979. From 1958 until 1971, he was Director of the Middle East Centre at St. Antony's. He has been a Visiting Professor at Harvard University, the Universities of Chicago and Pennsylvania, and the American University of Beirut. He is the author of numerous studies including *Syria and Lebanon: A Political Essay* (1946), *A Vision of History* (1961), *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (1962 and 1983), *Europe and the Middle East* (1980) and *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East* (1981). He now resides in London, where he is completing a history of the Middle East from the rise of Islam to present times.

> law-abiding country in many important respects and passions are held in check: public order is maintained without a large display.

On the next page, however, the note of doubt and caution can be heard:

> Lebanon is not a civil society. It has many of the requisite qualities, but it lacks an essential one: the politically relevant members of Lebanese society are not inclined to allow the obligations which arise from their membership of the society to supervene when they feel that interests which they regard as vital are threatened . . . It lacks that attachment to the national society as a whole, that sense of identity . . .

It may be, he adds, that Lebanon will become a civil society in this sense, but there is a necessary condition for this: Lebanon is a country which must be kept completely still politically . . . It must be still internally, and it must exist within a still Middle Eastern environment.[1]

Since 1975, of course, Lebanon has been far from still, and in the last ten years another view has become common, of Lebanon as a country where different religious communities regard each other with mutual suspicion and hostility, which have exploded from time to time in civil war and massacre. This is a view put forward in particular by those who have tried to intervene in the affairs of the country, and have on the whole made things worse.

Looking at Lebanese history as a whole, we shall find that the truth is more complicated. On the whole it has been a history of symbiosis between communities, but on two occasions this has broken down: in the middle of the 19th century, from the 1830's to 1860,and in the present century since 1975. In both periods, the breakdown has been of a kind which has posed the question: how strong was the symbiosis, how really deep was the sense of living together in society? To answer this we must know something about the nature and history of the country.

We tend to think of states as being natural entities, with their different regions forming a single whole which not only is but ought to be politically united. This is the logic, or at least the rhetoric, of nationalism. In fact, however, all states are artificial in the literal sense: that is to say, they have been formed by specific historical processes, by human acts within a given physical environment over a period of time. If we look at Lebanon we can see it in two ways, as part of a larger unit and as itself formed of smaller ones.

---

1. Edward Shils, "The Prospect for Lebanese Civility," in Leonard Binder, ed., *Politics in Lebanon* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1966), pp. 1-11.

The larger region of which it forms part is that which is now included in the sovereign states of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel, and which was known to earlier generations simply as "Syria". This name is used here as a historical statement and not a political one. I do not mean to imply that these four states, or any two of them, ought to be incorporated into a single "Syrian" state. If there is any political implication, it is that whatever states exist within this area have a peculiarly close and intimate relationship with each other, and their fate is bound up with each other, whether they wish it or not.

Lebanon is also composed of different regions, however. To put it rather too simply, there are three main regions. First, there is the eastern Mediterranean seacoast, a thin strip of land with some natural resources but important mainly for its ports. It has no great natural harbor but a number of smaller ones, and there is a line of ports along the coast which have risen and fallen at different times. In ancient times there were the Phoenician ports, Tyre and Sidon and others; in medieval times, Beirut was important at some moments and Tripoli at others. In the 18th century, Sidon was the main port, but was later replaced by Acre. The 19th century saw the rise of Beirut, whose predominance was challenged for a time in the first half of the 20th century by Haifa, and then reasserted itself, for reasons I shall explain later. In the last ten years, under the stress of civil war, a number of small ports have risen at various points on the coast. These ports have always had links with the whole Mediterranean world and with the great cities of the interior, Damascus, Aleppo and others, and such links have helped to define the wider area within which Lebanon has always lived.

Rising from the coast there is a second region, that of the succession of mountains and hills running from north to south and now known collectively as Mount Lebanon. The valleys facing the sea are well-watered by rainfall, and for many centuries the soil has been fixed on the hillsides by careful terracing. There is a possibility of mixed farming (the mulberry tree was particularly important in the past, the apple tree more recently). But it is a limited possibility; the valleys do not produce a large surplus, and the life of their inhabitants is the small-scale life of villages and market towns.

The third region is the Biqa^{c}, an inner plain on the other side of the mountains where a different kind of rural life has existed: wheat is grown, sheep are grazed, and the conglomerations are rather larger than in the mountains. This valley has always been a channel of communication, with roads running from north to south.

The difference between these three kinds of region helps to explain something about the nature of the country. The life of the mountains has been an enclosed life, away from the outside world; that of the ports and the inner valley has been open to a broader world. There is another kind of distinction, however, which is equally important; it is that which is familiar to most of us

now, between communities which differ from each other in inherited beliefs and practices. Among the Christians, one community has been particularly important: the Maronites, a church and community with a very distinct history, predominant in the northern part of the mountains, but existing also further south. There are also Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Armenians and others. Among the Muslims, there are Sunnis, mainly in the coastal towns, and Shi^{c}is in the south and the Biqa^c. These are the two main groups of Muslims; the division between them arose from a dispute about where legitimate authority lies in the Muslim community, and in course of time differences of doctrine, law, spirituality and historical tradition gathered around this. Together with these there is a third group, the Druzes, whose faith is a development out of Shi^{c}i Islam, and who have gradually created their own body of scriptures, a strict system of social morality, and a closed community with a strong solidarity. They live mainly in the southern half of the mountains.

This geographical distribution of the communities is the product of a long and continuing historical process. Gradually over the centuries the Maronites moved southwards from the extreme northern mountains; gradually the Shi^{c}is were dislodged from the north; there have always been Sunnis in the main cities of the coast, but their numbers increased in the 18th century. There are two communities of recent settlement, dislodged from elsewhere by political upheavals. The Armenians came in from Turkey after World War I; they have their own church and national identity, their language and historical memories. The Palestinians came mainly after the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948; they are mainly Muslims, although there are some Christians, and they too have their own sense of national identity, and are united by a common memory of dispossession. There have been further shifts of population in the stress of the last ten years, but it is difficult to say how permanent they will be.

This division into religious communities is the one thing which almost everyone now knows about Lebanon, and it is worth our while to try to understand it. It is often stated in terms of Muslims and Christians, or Muslims against Christians, but this is to oversimplify it. The differences of community within each religion are important. At moments of extreme tension there may be a tendency for the different Christian communities or the different Muslim communities to come together, but such a situation does not last long, and for the most part the active sense of identity is that of the more limited group. Within each religion there have been tensions and oppositions: Catholics against Orthodox, Sunnis against Shi^{c}is.

We should remember also that the division along religious lines is not a total division. There is a unity of language; all groups are Arabic-speaking, except for some of the Armenians. There is a similarity of popular culture, of manners, habits of life, cuisine, and even the popular religion of the countryside; one can still find in the Lebanese mountains sacred springs and

sacred trees on which votive rags are hung, the outward symbols of a divine presence.

Many villages and almost all the cities are mixed in population. But the example of the great cities of the modern world, in Europe and America, shows us that those who live as neighbors do not always live as friends, and if there is to be a "civil society" — to use Shils's term — two things are necessary: a system of institutions — that is to say, generally accepted habits of collective behavior — and an authority to uphold them, for without authority institutions cannot take root and survive the strains of living in common.

Throughout history, Lebanon, like most Mediterranean countries, has had two kinds of authority coexisting with each other. In the mountain valleys, the life of small towns and villages has produced its own kind of rule, that of "lords of the valleys", dominating a district from their strongholds or castles, controlling the land, enforcing their power through strong-arm men, but having a relationship with those they rule which from being one of power has tended to become a moral one, particularly if there is another kind of authority associated with that of the lords, the authority of religious specialists — Christian priests, Muslim *^{c}ulama,* Druze *^{c}uqqal* — who administer religious laws, arbitrate disputes and uphold the moral traditions of the community.

The mountains of Lebanon lie between the ports of the coast and the plains and cities of the interior, and here there has been another kind of authority, that of urban governments, bureaucratically organized, relying on professional armies, linking their interests with those of the cities, or at least of the dominant classes in them, and radiating out over the dependent countryside which provides the cities with their food and raw materials.

Between these two types of authority there has been a certain pattern of relationships which has repeated itself throughout history. The urban government has had direct control over the ports, cities, main roads and plains of the interior, but has rarely tried to rule the mountain valleys directly. They are too poor, too inaccessible to make it worth the effort. It is enough to have indirect control; lords of the valleys have been appointed as governors or tax collectors, but at the same time they have tried to keep their freedom of action, and the exact balance between the two authorities has varied according to the strength of each of them, and to what is happening in the outside world. The dialectic of the mountain and the city runs all through Lebanese history.

There is no need to trace this pattern through all the centuries, but I must go back to the Middle Ages because of three processes which it is important to notice during the first centuries of the Islamic era, running from the 7th to the 15th century. In the 10th and 11th centuries, much of "Syria" in the broader geographical sense was incorporated into an Egyptian state, that of the Fatimid Caliphs. The Fatimids belonged to the Isma^{c}ili community, a branch of the Shi^{c}is, and at this time Shi^{c}ism became widespread in Syria. Perhaps a

majority of its Muslim inhabitants were Shi^{c}is, and in the mountains there was a proliferation of different Shi^{c}i sects. It is typical of isolated mountain communities that they should adopt a creed different from that of the surrounding world and cling to it with a sometimes tragic faithfulness. One offshoot of Shi^{c}ism was to be particularly important, for it was at this time that the Druzes appeared as a separate community.

The second event to notice is the coming of the Crusaders from western Europe, and the establishment of European Catholic states at the end of the 11th century: the Kingdom of Jerusalem and the County of Tripoli. They did not survive long, but their existence had a lasting effect on the Maronite Church. It had continued to exist in northern Lebanon after the coming of Islam, with its own doctrine and traditions, but in this period, in roughly 1180, it established links with the Papacy and accepted Catholic doctrine, while preserving its own hierarchy, liturgy and customs. By 1215, the relationship was strong enough for the Maronite Patriarch to attend the greatest council of the medieval Catholic church, the Lateran Council in Rome.

From the 12th century, there was a reaction of the Sunni Muslims against both Crusaders and Shi^{c}is. A strong state was created which included both Syria and Egypt, under two successive dynasties, the Ayyubids and Mamluks. Sunnism spread, the great cities and centers of power and wealth — Aleppo, Damascus, Tripoli — became centers of orthodox learning. The Shi^{c}i communities shrank, and survived mainly in the mountains. Their religious and legal learning was deprived of the support of the rulers and population of the cities. In such circumstances, one might expect a tradition of high culture to shrink and disappear, and this indeed happened in some of the communities, but not in the main Shi^{c}i community in southern Lebanon. There happened something which is almost unique in Islamic history, the survival of a tradition of high learning in small villages and market towns. There may have been several reasons for this, and it had one important effect. When Shah Isma^{c}il proclaimed Shi^{c}ism to be the official religion of Iran at the beginning of the 16th century, there were few Shi^{c}i scholars and divines in the country, and he had to bring them from Iraq, Bahrain and Lebanon. Important families of scholars and religious officials emigrated from Lebanon to Iran, and they helped to create and maintain the fabric of Shi^{c}i judicial and religious learning there. The great mosque and school of Shaikh Lutfallah in Isfahan are named after one of these immigrants from a village in Lebanon. The link between the Shi^{c}is and Iran, like the link between the Maronites and the Papacy, helped to define the space within which Lebanon was to live and move.

The dominant authority in Lebanon was to continue to be that of Sunni Muslims for some centuries. In the early 16th century, Lebanon and the rest of Syria were incorporated into the Ottoman Empire, with its capital at Istanbul. Ruled mainly by Turks, this was a universal Islamic state, and the largest

political structure in the western half of the world since the Roman Empire. It was a long-surviving state, and for 400 years it was to be the dominant factor in the life of the countries it ruled.

It was in this period that the lineaments of Lebanon as we now know it began to appear. The main lines of Ottoman policy were similar to those in other mountain districts ruled by the Turks, from Kabylia in Algeria to Albania in southeastern Europe. They maintained strong control over the cities, which were important for them: Aleppo was a great center of international trade, and Damascus was the place from which the annual pilgrimage to Mecca was organized. Their control spread out from the cities over the surrounding countryside, and beyond this the Turks made agreements with powerful families, whom they recognized as local rulers so long as they collected taxes, maintained order, and did not interfere with the imperial roads.

A balance was struck therefore between imperial and local authorities, but as always it was an unstable balance, and in the first half of the 17th century it was upset for a time. One local lord, Fakhr al-Din, the Druze ruler of the district of Shuf, extended his rule from there over the whole of Lebanon and beyond. This was a time of disturbance in many parts of the Ottoman Empire; there were local revolts of various kinds. That of Fakhr al-Din was supported by some of the Italian states, in particular the Grand Duchy of Tuscany; they were interested in the cultivation of silk in Lebanon, and had the new strength of the Catholic Europe of the Counter-Reformation. Fakhr al-Din himself spent some time in exile in the Duchy of Tuscany, at Florence, and is said to have brought back from there the masons, carpenters and other artisans who gave Lebanon its distinctive type of architecture, the stone-built houses with their arches and central halls. In Lebanese history he is often regarded as the father of the Lebanese nation. There is an element of truth in this: he ruled the whole of what later became Lebanon, and although himself a Druze he had some Christian officials. But this view of him is exaggerated. The state he created was a personal one, it did not express itself in institutions, and it did not last long. When Fakhr al-Din was finally defeated by the Ottomans, central control came back in a stronger form; from that time the mountain was surrounded on all sides by powerful centers of Ottoman power, Damascus, Tripoli and Sidon.

Something had changed, however. From now onwards there were new links with Europe, and not only with the Italian states. Catholic missions were established and schools were opened. The Maronite College in Rome trained educated priests. There were links also with the French monarchy. Louis XIV ordered his ambassadors and consuls to use their influence to protect the Maronite Church, and from now onwards this was to remain a permanent theme of French policy. A member of a local family of lords, that of Khazin, was appointed French consular agent in Beirut.

There was also a new kind of self-consciousness. Educated men, first priests and then also laymen, became interested in the history and traditions of their own communities, and from this time there grew up a tradition of local history of a kind which is rare among country-dwellers. In this period historians wrote about a particular district, or about the Maronite Church, and in their work we cannot yet discern Lebanon as we now know it. If we want a symbolic date for the emergence of Lebanon, it might be 1697, when the family to which Fakhr al-Din belonged became extinct, and some of the lords met in the village of Simqaniyya and chose as their new overlord a member of the family of Shihab, from a southern district. This was not exactly a free expression of autonomy. The Ottoman governor of Sidon wanted someone with whom to deal on matters of taxation and public order, and, rather than bringing in someone from outside, he needed someone who could command the loyalty of the local population, as an intermediary; this indeed was a common pattern of Ottoman rule.

The Ottomans kept their control throughout the 18th century, but, within the limits they imposed, the Shihab princes were able to extend their power in the mountain and to create something recognizably similar to the Lebanon of a later time. They extended their rule from the southern to the northern parts of Lebanon, and they created a political structure. In 1711 there took place a battle, in which the faction led by them defeated another one, and after that they divided out the collection of taxes, and therefore control of the land, among the families which had supported them. Thus there came into existence, more fully than before, something which can be called, without too much distortion of the term, a Lebanese feudal system, a hierarchy of families having formal relations with each other, controlling cultivation and demanding personal services from the peasants. In this system, there was a symbiosis between Druze and Christian lordly families. Agreements and alliances cut across religious lines; much of the political history of this period can be explained in terms of the relations between three families, the Sunni Shihabs, the Druze Jumblats, and the Maronite Khazins. There was no overt religious conflict; when there were local fights, as there were from time to time, they were fights between factions or parties, not between communities. There was social distance between them, however. There was no intermarriage; men met in the market-place and separated in their homes.

This political structure was strong enough to contain the social changes which took place throughout the 18th century. There were two processes which in the end were to be in opposition to each other. On the one hand, the Druze lords, and in particular the family of Jumblat, extended their power over the land, beyond the mountains and into the Biqa^{c} valley. On the other hand, the Maronite community expanded. Its population grew and moved southwards; Maronite peasants produced silk on lands controlled by Druze

lords. The educated priests and laymen served as officials for the Shihabs and other families; in the later part of the century there happened something perhaps unique in the annals of the Ottoman Empire, when part of the Shihab family was converted from Sunni Islam to Maronite Christianity. The Maronite Church strengthened its postion by making a formal agreement with the Papacy in 1736.

In the early 19th century the delicate balance of forces began to be shaken. The Ottoman central government was trying to strengthen its authority; then, in the 1830's, Syria was occupied by the army of the powerful, virtually independent Ottoman governor of Egypt, Muhammad ᶜAli. The Shihab prince, Bashir II, the most powerful of his line, supported Muhammad ᶜAli, but what might have appeared to be a strengthening of his position in fact weakened it. By drawing too close to the Egyptian ruler, he drew further away from the hierarchy of local families; from being an intermediary with some freedom of action, he became an instrument of Egyptian control.

By this time a new kind of imperial authority was appearing behind that of the Ottomans. In the 18th century the European states had only had limited interests in Lebanon. There was some French trade, mainly with Sidon; during the Napoleonic wars, the French army established itself in Egypt and moved up the coastal road through Palestine, but did not come quite as far as Lebanon. After the end of the wars, however, trade grew rapidly: the French bought Lebanese silk, the British exported Lancashire cottons. Major European interests became involved in the affairs of Lebanon and Syria. In the late 1830's there was a crisis in the relationship between Muhammad ᶜAli and his nominal suzerain, the Ottoman Sultan. It ended in war, and the European powers, except for France, supported the Sultan for reasons of their own. In 1840 Muhammad ᶜAli was forced to leave Syria.

Ottoman rule was now restored, but in a new form. This was the age of the Tanzimat, the Ottoman reforms, which meant more centralized and uniform government; local rule like that of the prince of Lebanon was an anomaly, and a dangerous one because it might open the way to European intervention. European influence was stronger than before; Ottoman rule had only been restored with the help of the European powers, and from this time onwards they became part of the structure of authority. This was the age of the consuls, who had great influence with the local Ottoman officials but looked beyond them and established direct relations with parts of the population: the French with the Maronites, the British with the Druzes, the Russians with the Orthodox Christians. The European governments and their local representatives pursued their interests, often in rivalry with each other, but at moments of crisis there might be a sense of common interests and obligations which would lead to common action, known in the diplomatic parlance of the time as the "Concert of Europe".

While these external influences were growing stronger, the local authority was growing weaker. In 1841 there were disturbances, which for the first time took the form of conflict between Druzes and Maronites. Their symbiosis had been shaken by events during the rule of Muhammad ᶜAli. Bashir had been deposed when the Egyptians left, and the weak Shihab prince who succeeded him could not control the country. In his turn he was deposed by the Ottoman government, and the princedom came to an end. It was replaced by a system of two cantons, one Druze and one Maronite; as a result, there was a growth of communal loyalties, unrestrained by common interests or solidarity.

The traditional balance inside the mountain had been overturned, but the situation could have been controlled had Lebanon been "still", to use Edward Shils's term. It was not still, however; the Lebanon of the time was a disturbed society. The Maronite population was growing and the structure of the community was changing. The Church was breaking out of the control of the great families, and becoming an independent political force. Among the Druzes, the power of the great families had been curbed by Egyptian rule; they were now trying to regain their position, and they had the support of a community which had a stronger solidarity than the others.

Both the dominant groups, the Maronite and the Druze lords, were threatened by social and economic change. Beirut was growing as a center of international trade, and its merchants wanted direct links with the cultivators, without the intervention of the lords. The small market towns of the interior were also growing as centers for the distribution of goods and the collection of produce; their merchants, who were mainly Christians in Druze territory, became money lenders to the local lords. Behind the interests of merchants there was the growing power and influence of the great European states. In this period there appears a familiar pattern of political action which has continued in a different form until today: action taking place on three different levels, with local forces, regional powers and great powers intertwined with each other in complex ways which could lead to tragic misunderstandings. The local forces might believe that the great powers would support them more fully than in fact they did; the great powers might believe that they had more control over the actions of their local clients than in fact they had.

This period of tension ended in some years of disturbance. In 1858, the peasants in the district of Kisrawan threw off the control of their local lords and set up a kind of peasant republic. Kisrawan was an almost entirely Christian district, but in 1860 something happened in the southern part of the mountains which had more dangerous implications, a confrontation of Druzes and Christians. There was a political element in this, and a social element, but as it came to a climax of civil war it acquired a religious coloring. The Druzes won militarily, there were some massacres in the market towns, and the general disturbance of spirits spread to other parts of Syria. There was a massacre of

Christians in Damascus by elements of the mob; this had rather different causes, and an important effect. It gave what had begun as a local crisis a different dimension. The Ottoman central government intervened to restore order; it had nothing to gain, and much to lose, if it was unable to maintain order and communal peace in the provinces of mixed population. The French government sent an expeditionary force, and the other powers intervened diplomatically.

The crisis ended with an international agreement on a new form of government, which was to last for more than half a century. This is remembered in the collective memory of Lebanon as a period of peace and prosperity. The cultivation of silk reached its heights in the 1860's; by 1900 it was beginning to decline, because of falling prices and the competition of Japanese and other silk. It is in this period that the Lebanon we know — or knew until the civil war — becomes recognizable. Two features of it in particular should be noticed. The first of them is the form of government. Lebanon was to have a governor appointed by the Ottoman government with the consent of the European powers; he should be a Christian, but chosen from outside Lebanon and therefore not a Maronite. He was assisted by an administrative council representing the different communities; members were chosen by a kind of election, and a new kind of political life therefore began. The system was placed under the protection of the European powers; Lebanon from now onwards was a privileged entity within the Ottoman Empire, and there was a feeling of autonomy in the air.

A second feature which emerged at this time was the relationship between Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Beirut was not officially part of the privileged district, but in effect it became its capital. Its growth was an example of the social change brought about by the expansion of European trade and by the coming of steam navigation: trade, wealth and a certain kind of power moved from the cities of the interior to the ports of the Mediterranean coast, from Cairo to Alexandria, from Damascus to Beirut. Beirut's population grew, mainly by immigration from the interior, from 10,000 in 1830 to approximately 100,000 in 1900. It was a mixed city, with a majority of Christians, largely Orthodox, but a strong and ancient Sunni Muslim presence. It was a new kind of city, dominated by a class of merchants living a life similar to that of the cities of Mediterranean Europe, in the new Italianate houses of the Sursuq quarter. It had foreign institutions — schools, hospitals, consulates — and links with the New World, with the movement of emigration which became important from the 1880's onwards.

The Beirut of the later 19th century had its distinctive culture. It was a city not only of merchants but of teachers and journalists adopting into Arabic the ideas, sciences and technology of modern Europe and America. Its monument is the encyclopedia produced by Butrus Bustani and his family: 11 volumes

published in Beirut and Cairo, a remarkable compendium of knowledge, ancient and modern, written in a clear and precise Arabic style. Its articles range from Arabic and Islamic subjects to modern science and technology; they include the first full treatment of Greek literature and mythology in Arabic. (A few years later, one of the members of the Bustani family was to make the first Arabic translation of Homer's *Iliad*.) The Beirut of this time also had a political culture of its own, that of Ottoman liberalism, believing in Ottoman unity based on equality between Muslims and non-Muslims and in representative institutions.

The Ottoman Empire finally disappeared at the end of the First World War, and the political geography of the Near East had to be re-made. "Syria" was divided in two ways. Britain was to rule the southern part under the new system of Mandates, and France the northern: and the northern part was divided into Syrian and Lebanese states. In 1920 "Greater Lebanon" was proclaimed as a separate state with a potential for independence and with enlarged territories; it included the coastal ports, Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon, and the Biqa^{c} valley. A few years later, in 1926, a Constitution was drawn up. Under its terms, there was to be a parliament representing the different communities, with an electoral system by which members were elected not only by their own community but by all voters in their district; in this way it was hoped that those who wished to be elected would appeal beyond the interests of their own community. After some years, a convention grew up that the President of the Republic should be a Christian, and normally a Maronite, and the Prime Minister a Sunni; it was later agreed that the President of the Chamber should be a Shi^{c}i. Posts in the administration were distributed among the communities in rough proportion to their strength.

There was something artificial about this system; it did not express the whole reality of Lebanon. When the country was enlarged, the demographic balance was changed. The Maronites were no longer a majority, although they were still the largest single community. Christians as a whole may not have been in a majority; there was a general agreement that they should be regarded as having a slight majority over the Muslims, but that no census should be taken, in case the results would shake the system. The political predominance of the Maronites therefore had something a little shaky about it.

The incorporation of Beirut, Tripoli and Sidon posed another kind of problem. It brought into the new Lebanon a variety of political cultures and ideologies: that of the Christian villages of the mountains, the idea of Lebanon as a Christian refuge; and that of the mixed cities, the idea of a coexistence of communities meeting in the market place, with an Arab or "Syrian" rather than a purely Lebanese coloring.

There was an underlying political tension in a context of economic stagnation. The silk trade virtually disappeared; the currency was linked to the

published in Beirut and Cairo, a remarkable compendium of knowledge, ancient and modern, written in a clear and precise Arabic style. Its articles range from Arabic and Islamic subjects to modern science and technology; they include the first full treatment of Greek literature and mythology in Arabic. (A few years later, one of the members of the Bustani family was to make the first Arabic translation of Homer's *Iliad*.) The Beirut of this time also had a political culture of its own, that of Ottoman liberalism, believing in Ottoman unity based on equality between Muslims and non-Muslims and in representative institutions.

The Ottoman Empire finally disappeared at the end of the First World War, and the political geography of the Near East had to be re-made. "Syria" was divided in two ways. Britain was to rule the southern part under the new system of Mandates, and France the northern: and the northern part was divided into Syrian and Lebanese states. In 1920 "Greater Lebanon" was proclaimed as a separate state with a potential for independence and with enlarged territories; it included the coastal ports, Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon, and the Biqa^c valley. A few years later, in 1926, a Constitution was drawn up. Under its terms, there was to be a parliament representing the different communities, with an electoral system by which members were elected not only by their own community but by all voters in their district; in this way it was hoped that those who wished to be elected would appeal beyond the interests of their own community. After some years, a convention grew up that the President of the Republic should be a Christian, and normally a Maronite, and the Prime Minister a Sunni; it was later agreed that the President of the Chamber should be a Shi^{c}i. Posts in the administration were distributed among the communities in rough proportion to their strength.

There was something artificial about this system; it did not express the whole reality of Lebanon. When the country was enlarged, the demographic balance was changed. The Maronites were no longer a majority, although they were still the largest single community. Christians as a whole may not have been in a majority; there was a general agreement that they should be regarded as having a slight majority over the Muslims, but that no census should be taken, in case the results would shake the system. The political predominance of the Maronites therefore had something a little shaky about it.

The incorporation of Beirut, Tripoli and Sidon posed another kind of problem. It brought into the new Lebanon a variety of political cultures and ideologies: that of the Christian villages of the mountains, the idea of Lebanon as a Christian refuge; and that of the mixed cities, the idea of a coexistence of communities meeting in the market place, with an Arab or "Syrian" rather than a purely Lebanese coloring.

There was an underlying political tension in a context of economic stagnation. The silk trade virtually disappeared; the currency was linked to the

The prosperity was associated with a certain choice of economic policies: capitalism in its most unrestrained form, with the minimum of state intervention, and with emphasis upon commerce and services more than agriculture and industry. This trend went so much against that of most newly independent countries in Asia and Africa that it is worth asking the reasons for it. One of them was, of course, the interests of the commercial and financial oligarchy of Beirut, closely linked as it was with the political elite. There was another reason, however: the political structure made a strong executive virtually impossible.

The purpose of the political system of Lebanon was to balance interests: those of the politicians themselves, their clients, and their communities and districts. To quote from the late, much lamented Malcolm Kerr: "Governments are not made to create public policy, nor to choose between clear-cut alternatives entailing the triumph of one set of demands over another, but to reflect faithfully and adjust the competing interests of various groups."[2] One attempt was made to break out of this system, and to make a clear choice. After the civil strife of 1958, a member of the former ruling family of Shihab was elected as President. Fu'ad Shihab was a soldier and not a politician. He was not part of Beirut political and commercial society, and rather despised it. Following de Gaulle, he might have said that he had a certain idea of Lebanon. He tried to create a strong executive and move the Lebanese economy in new directions, but beyond certain limits he had no lasting success; he had no effective political support or adequate structure of administration.

Lebanon at this time had another kind of prosperity. Beirut became the great market place of ideas for the Arab world. Its schools and universities educated a new generation. Its press was free. Its publishers distributed books throughout the Arab countries. Its poets created powerful images for a world disoriented by rapid change. The symbolic expression of this flowering of Lebanese culture was the Ba^{c}albek Festival, an international festival of music and drama, directed by a committee which was an embodiment of the elite of Beirut.

This feverish activity, however, concealed or perhaps revealed that all was not well. Lebanon was not still. First of all there was demographic change. In the absence of a census, estimates can only be rough. By 1975 a figure of some 2.5 million was often suggested; but this did not include Palestinians in the refugee camps and immigrant workers, and the real total may have been nearer to 3.5 million. In this population, the Maronites were no longer the largest community; their place had been taken by the Shi^{c}is. The Christians were almost certainly not a majority. There was pressure to adjust the political

[2] Malcolm H. Kerr, "Political Decision Making in a Confessional Democracy" in Binder, *Politics in Lebanon* p. 190.

system to take account of the new situation, and this might possibly have taken place, had not the growth in population been linked with a change in its distribution. The cities were growing rapidly, and in particular Beirut. Perhaps a million people lived in greater Beirut; a larger number worked there; an even greater number were economically dependent upon it. Lebanon had changed from being a mountain republic to a city state.

In a sense, then, the city had absorbed the mountain, but in other ways the mountain now began to take over the city. Beirut had a class-structure typical of the modern city: differences of wealth, an increasing ostentation of wealth, differences of collective consciousness. An urban proletariat had appeared, and it happened to be drawn mainly from two immigrant communities, Palestinians from the camps and Shi^{c}is from the south. The politically active section of the population had expanded, and its politics were of a new kind: not the politics of sectional interests only, but those of ideologies. Insofar as there was a sense of Lebanese identity, there were very different ideas of what Lebanon should be: the Maronite vision of a basically Christian country linked with the Christian world; the Sunni vision of an Arab Lebanon; Druze and Shi^{c}i visions which had been slower to articulate themselves, but could draw upon a long tradition of thought. The Palestinians too had their own ideas; they were not part of the Lebanese political community, and their vision was of a Palestinian national community in a different kind of Arab world.

Cities have to be ruled in a different way from mountain villages. Government is no longer a question of balancing the interests of powerful families or of districts. The city population needs an authority to maintain order in a complicated situation, and a variety of public services. It was here that the structural weaknesses of the Lebanese political system showed itself. It proved to be incapable of governing the vast and rapidly growing city of rural immigrants. They turned elsewhere for protection and services, to organizations which expressed their own identity, and that identity was a communal and regional one. A Lebanese anthropologist, Fuad Khuri, has shown that the rural immigrants into the suburbs of Beirut tended to settle in their own communities, and to become, if anything, more conscious of the links of religion or local origin than they had been in their villages.[3] The organizations to which they turned and which drew strength from them — the Phalanges, the PLO, Amal — were to become armed bodies in conditions of breakdown of order, and to acquire an independent life and activity of their own.

All these changes might have been controllable had Lebanon existed in a still Middle Eastern environment. By the late 1960's, however, the environment was far from still. The central political problem of the Middle East, that

---

[3] Fuad I. Khuri, *From Village to Suburb: Order and Change in Greater Beirut* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

of Israel and Palestine, stirred into life again after having been almost quiescent for a number of years, and Lebanon, being small and weak and very near the conflict, could not be untouched by it. Once more the familiar cycle of events was set in motion, conflicts of political leaders and factions, carrying overtones of social unrest and drawing in the local powers, Syria and Israel, with, behind them, an ambiguous involvement of the world powers: that cycle in which Lebanon now seems to be almost inescapably imprisoned.